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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002386

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR BADER, WALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/03/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND: RED SHIRTS PREPARE TO MARCH ON THIRD
ANNIVERSARY OF COUP WHICH OUSTED THAKSIN

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), aka the "red-shirts," will gather at Sanam Luang on Saturday, September 19 to mark the third anniversary of the coup that ousted fugitive former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. UDD leaders claim an estimated 50-60,000 will join the demonstration and insist the rally will be peaceful; authorities predict 20-30,000 may join. As with the aborted August 30 demonstration, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has invoked the Internal Security Act (ISA) in advance of the rally to try to head off any potential trouble from the red-shirts. During Ambassador's September 18 meeting with Yongyuth Wichaidit, leader of the opposition Puea Thai party, like the UDD seen as taking direction from Thaksin, Yongyuth said that he expected that the red rally would unfold without incident. However, he warned any deaths or injuries to red-shirt members could trigger tremendous backlash (SEPTEL).

12. (SBU) Comment: After two aborted demonstrations in the past four weeks, the anti-government UDD appears determined to stage its rally this time. The government's decision to invoke the ISA seems logical when viewed through the lens of the chaos and violence that gripped Bangkok and Pattaya during red demonstrations this past April. We suspect the move should prove sufficient to prevent events from spinning out of control. That said, while UDD leaders have assured us that the gathering would be peaceful, their public acknowledgement that some demonstrators would carry weapons for self-defense underscores the potential for trouble anytime red-shirts hit the streets. We will monitor events on September 19 and have issued a Warden message. End Summary and Comment.

WE'RE GOING TO RALLY THIS TIME...REALLY

13. (SBU) After two aborted demonstrations in the past four weeks, the anti-government UDD appears determined to stage a rally on Saturday, September 19 to mark the three year anniversary of the coup which removed then PM Thaksin while he was attending the UN General Assembly in New York. Red-shirt leaders claimed to us that 50,000 to 60,000 people -- nearly double tQeQQ^Q~L~Thaksin will address the

rally at 8:30 that evening via a video link, after which the demonstrators plan to march to the home of Privy Council President General Prem Tinsulanon. For their part, authorities have vowed to restrict access to the street on which Prem resides.

14. (U) At a luncheon for the diplomatic corps and foreign journalists on September 17, UDD core leader Vira Musikapong claimed the Saturday rally would be peaceful, noting that the UDD was planning for an unspecified "something" on September 21, 22, and 30. When pressed by a reporter to elaborate further, Vira specified only that key court rulings were due on those dates. On the 21st the verdict in the rubber sapling case (in which behind the scenes power broker Newin Chidchob is implicated) would be announced; on the 22nd the case against the Samak administration related to Preah Vihear agreements was due, while on the 30th, they expected a verdict in lottery case against Thaksin.

GOVERNMENT PREPARING FOR TROUBLE

15. (U) As was the case in advance of the previously planned August 30 red-shirt protest, the Cabinet approved invocation of the ISA for Dusit district, which encompasses the area surrounding Sanam Luang and Government House starting Friday, September 18 through Tuesday, September 22. The government has readied up to 6,500 police officers and soldiers to maintain order at the rally site. After PM Abhisit met with military and police officials September 17 to discuss ISA implementation, the government announced that demonstrators

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would be banned from approaching Government House and Prem's home.

PUEA THAI LEADER EXPECTS RALLY TO BE PEACEFUL

16. (C) During the Ambassador,s September 18 meeting with Pue Thai leader Yongyuth Wichaidit, Yongyuth told the Ambassador that he expected the September 19 rally to take place without incident. That said, Yongyuth worried that in the event any red-shirts were hurt by government security forces, a "crisis" could quickly ensue. On balance, however, Yongyuth suspected violence was unlikely.
JOHN